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Mr. W. J. Cotter  
Chief Postal Inspector  
U.S. Post Office  
Washington, D. C.

Dear Mr. Cotter:

The Federation of American Scientists is engaged in a preliminary investigation of the problem of mail covers with a view to appropriate legislation if any is required. A search of the literature, and examination of the postal manuals, gives rise to the following questions:

1) Are there any circumstances in which the Postal Service permits the opening of first class mail, domestic or foreign, without the consent of the addressee and without a court warrant by any Government agency whatsoever?

2) Does the Postal Service permit any Governmental Agency whatsoever to read, or try to read, the contents of first class mail without "breaking the seal" upon it possibly through the use of technological aids of various kinds.

3) As part of mail cover, would the Postal Service permit a search for fingerprints on the outside of a first-class letter.

4) Has the Post Office ever discovered efforts by State or Federal Agencies to corrupt Postal Officials to violate mail cover regulations by inducing them to open first class mail, or to lend it to other agencies, for the purpose of obtaining the information contained therein?

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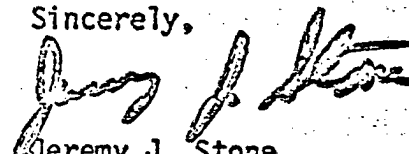
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We wonder if the Post Office would be willing to answer these questions for us, either in writing or in an interview with a Postal official set up at his convenience. The Federation is acting in this matter as a lobbyist in the public interest, and it would welcome whatever cooperation could be provided. We recognize, I might add, that the Post Office has a generally good record in many aspects of the privacy issues that concern us.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Jeremy J. Stone  
Director

JJS:dc